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SUBJECT: BELGIANS PONDER LEVEL OF PARTICIPATION AT IRAQ
COMPACT SIGNING

REF: STATE 46243

Classified By: ECONCOUNS TERRI L. ROBL, REASONS 1.4 B/D

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Government of Belgium will be represented at the signing of the International Compact with Iraq (ICI) on May 3 in Sharm el-Sheikh, at a minimum by its ambassador to Egypt. (Note: The Belgian political scene, including the agendas of ministers, is currently dominated by preparations for the June 10 federal elections. End note). Belgium continues to express concerns about the security situation in Iraq and the slow pace of national reconciliation efforts. It is unlikely that the GOB will introduce new pledges of support at the May 3 meeting beyond its member state contributions to the European Union. However, Belgium does plan to announce a pledge of 500,000 euros (\$675,900) toward humanitarian relief for displaced Iraqis at the April 17-18 United Nation High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) conference in Geneva. Belgian ministers are also considering a contribution of 250,000 euros (\$337,800) to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) for protection of UN personnel serving there. END SUMMARY

SECURITY CONCERNS REMAIN

¶2. (SBU) Econoff presented reftel demarche to Yves Rogister, desk officer for Iraq at the Belgian MFA, April 13. Rogister confirmed that Belgium will send a representative, at least its ambassador to Egypt, to the ICI signing on May 3, but explained that because of busy pre-election schedules it may not be possible for Belgium to send a ministerial-level representative. A ministerial-level delegation would be led by either the Foreign Minister or the Minister of Cooperation and Development.

¶3. (C) According to Rogister, Belgium shares the view of larger EU members, such as France and Germany, that reconstruction efforts in Iraq need to be closely developed along with improvements in security and progress in the political process, including national reconciliation and good governance. Rogister stated that it would be difficult for Belgium to consider further pledges toward reconstruction efforts absent improvements in security and a stabilization of the political situation. Rogister expressed hope that the ICI would oblige Arab Gulf States, particularly Saudi Arabia, to become more involved in helping to improve the situation in Iraq by honoring promises made in October 2003 at the Madrid conference.

500,000 EUROS: SUPPORT FOR UNHCR IN HELPING IRAQI REFUGEES

¶4. (SBU) Rogister stated that Belgium will announce a pledge

of 500,000 euros at the April 17-18 Geneva UNHCR conference on Iraqi refugees and internally displaced persons. By way of background, Rogister explained that Belgium had previously donated to the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI), with whose work the GOB is pleased. However, because IRFFI focuses just on Iraq, Belgium has decided to shift its support to UNHCR, which is tackling the problem at the regional level.

NO C-130, BUT A POSSIBLE CONTRIBUTION TO UNAMI

15. (C) Rogister further stated that Belgium's Council of Ministers may consider before the end of April a pledge of 250,000 euros in support of UNAMI for the protection of UN personnel. Rogister emphasized that while the contribution would not be a military one, some Belgian ministers could view it as such, which could complicate the debate. There is strong opposition from the Belgian public and from some cabinet members to Belgium's playing any kind of military role in Iraq. Rogister underscored Belgium's support for the UN in Iraq, calling the UN's presence "essential." Rogister expressed hope that the 250,000 euro potential contribution could be seen as compensation for the unfulfilled promise of the C-130 aircraft that is no longer available because Belgian Defense Minister Andre Flahaut has blocked its usage.

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